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Rutgers, M.R.

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Chapter 2

Theory and Scope of Public Administration: An Introduction to the Study's Epistemology

Mark Rutgers

Introduction: A Search for Identity

In 1968, Waldo published an article, "Scope of the Theory of Public Administration" in which he makes the famous statement that the study of public administration has an identity crisis. This is in a nutshell the topic of this chapter: what is the study's identity in light of its scope (or subject matter), and theories (or explanatory concepts)? The focus is on understanding the complex nature of our ideas on the study of public administration and why its "identity" seems to evade us.

Although all social studies have difficulty in pinpointing their object of study, as the nineteenth century German scholar Von Stein argued, it is the worst for the study of public administration as its subject matter, that is, public administration, presupposes an overwhelming number of other complex concepts: ranging from the nature of humanity and justice, to society, law, and the state. Yet, no reason to despair, for as indicated, social studies in general have some vague comprehensive notion of what part of reality they are about. Nevertheless, it is not a trivial matter, for what we focus on makes a difference to what is regarded a relevant phenomenon (i.e., what is real) as well as how it can be explained. The difficulty for the social sciences is that their object of study is intertwined with ideas about justice, order, (proper) behavior, responsibility, that is, with our values and social constructs. Still, similar issues surround physics (the sciences) too. For instance, the famous physicist Richard Feynman is known to have redrawn the field "just" by writing a new textbook. He presented the field, its topics, concerns, and the interrelationships between them in a new way, thereby providing a different understanding of what the study was about.

Why would we be interested in the theory and scope of public administration? To begin with, most of us are interested in specific issues: running an organization, attainment of

policy goals, and the like. That is obviously what public administration is about. So perhaps we can simply take stock of what is being studied by public administration scholars? The problem is that we end up going around in a circle: for who are we to consider authors on public administration? People calling themselves so? Scholars paid a salary as members of a university department called public administration? In other words, we somehow have to start with ideas of what public administration is.

<B>Public Administration versus public administration
The very term "public administration" can easily result in confusion. First, the term can refer to a social reality of people and organizations, budgets, administrators, and so on. Next, the term may distinguish between its everyday, nonscientific use in social practice, and its scholarly application. In the former case, the term refers to fuzzy notions in society. In the latter case, the term denotes the object of study and ideally allows for a more or less precise definition. Take for example the term "bureaucracy": in everyday circumstances it implies "government," "bureaucrats," "red tape," and so on with usually negative connotations. On the other hand, an academic study of "bureaucracy" defines a specific theoretical context, and is not intended to be normative, but to aid observation.

Second, public administration can denote a specific academic field of study, that is, the science or study of public administration. Here, a study and its object of study seem to coincide: political science and politics clearly are not the same, nor are sociological questions and social problems. Contrary to most other languages English does not provide us with distinct terms for study and object of study, such as in German *Verwaltunsgwissenschaft* and *öffentliche Verwaltung* or in Dutch *bestuurskunde* and *openbaar bestuur*. Waldo pointed out this problem in 1968 and suggested to use: "upper case to refer to the self-conscious enterprise of study, and the like, and lower case to refer to the practices or processes which are the object of our attention" (Waldo 1968, 1). However, even Waldo forgets to capitalize when applicable. I propose an equally simple solution, not to capitalize but simply use the term "the study of public administration" for the study and the term "public administration" for the part of social reality it studies. Thus, '"the theory and scope of public administration" in the chapter title should read: theory and scope of the study of public administration.

How to Study Theory & Scope?
Together, theory and scope comprehensively denote the identity of a field of inquiry. To start with the latter, scope concerns the question: What is the study of public administration

actually studying, that is, what are the accepted topics taken into consideration? At first glance, this question seems easy to answer: we can look for a definition of public administration and deduce from this definition what phenomena are relevant. Alternatively, we can identify the topics dealt with in books and articles and thereby establish its scope. However, as Waldo puts it: "'public administration' is itself problematic, controversial" (Waldo 1968, 2).

As for theory, the question is: What are the accepted ways of study? Theory concerns ideas about the nature of reality. They are at the heart of explanations how and why things are as they are, or should be. The basic kind of explanation, in turn, places something in a context, that is, to fit it into what we already know to enable us to provide meaning to it. In this basic sense, theories are an everyday matter and all around, although often implicit. Moreover, they can be very unreliable or limited in use. Theories explaining ideas about reality serve as a basis of action. Better everyday theories may result in better (more effective and/or efficient) actions. *Scientific* theories are rationally best available "guesses" or hypotheses. Scientific or academic research aims at refining theories by testing through application of the most rigorous methodological standards.

Additionally, two related (yet, analytically distinct) issues are implied: first, the ideas or way to arrive at valid theories and to test and improve them (i.e., the methodology) and second, the image of reality a theory encompasses or creates (i.e., ontology). The methodology concerns questions in the field of the philosophy of the social sciences: "Should PA develop paradigms?" "Is a positivistic approach viable?" or "What does interdisciplinarity mean?" The ontology concerns the philosophy of public administration, and enters into the broader fields of political, social, economic, legal, and moral philosophy. Both issues are ultimately a matter of epistemology, that is, how we know reality.

Before delving into these topics, the next section outlines the history of the study of public administration over the centuries. The third section describes how the scope of the study will be taken into consideration, followed by a concise description of the meaning of "public administration," that is, the ontology in the following section. After that, the methodology of the study will be discussed, with particular attention to the topic of interdisciplinarity.

A Brief History of the Study
The idea that public administration is a subject that can or should be distinguished from others social practices developed slowly. A conscious notion of "public administration" as a social

phenomenon only emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. Yet, special attention for the state organization and its servants predates this unique idea by at least two centuries. A lot of concepts and ideas we now consider part of the study are even considerably older, and, also not necessarily Western in origin. However, the Western world developed the modern study of public administration as a specialized academic study. Distinct phases of historic development can be distinguished (Rutgers 2004) and will be outlined here.

Classic Period

As evidenced by achievements such as Stonehenge, Mesa Verde, and many more awe inspiring archaeological sites, already in prehistory ideas about leadership, organization, and must have been practiced. The first records of what can be called administrative ideas are Sumerian 5000 years ago. The invention of script marks the birth of history in a formal sense. Many administrative ideas and insights were develop; script itself being the prime administrative invention in origin. The so-called instruction literature developed and provided moral guidance for how to behave and work in government. This kind of literature is still written in the Middle Ages and beyond, and called Mirrors of Princes (in the West) or admonitions in China (cf. Yang 2015).

During the Classic period great ideas were developed and handed down by Greek and Roman authors. Medieval authors should not be overlooked. They developed, for instance, double book keeping. Nevertheless, no specific study of public administration emerged in the Classic period. Things only start to change after the middle ages.

The Modern Study of Public Administration

There was no notion of public administration being a topic that deserves special attention till the early eighteenth century. Nevertheless, a first attempt is provided by Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff's *Teutscher Fürstenstaat*, or German Principality published as early as 1656. Seckendorff described topics germane to the administration of a small principality. He explicitly distinguished himself from the existing studies at the university in philosophy, politics and religion: the practice of public administration required a different body of knowledge. Similar ideas were voiced around 1700 in France by Nicolas Delamare. In his *Traité de la Police* (1703–1738), or Treatise on Polity, he pointed out that his approach was new, and indicated the differences with a legal treatises. To the modern reader, both books by Seckendorff and Delamare seem primarily hodgepodge collections of ideas for running a state administration. Nevertheless, a special body of knowledge was beginning to emerge.

The new study really took hold throughout the seventeenth century in the guise of the so called council studies: cameralism and polity science. An important date is 1729 when the first two university professors of cameralism were appointed in Prussia. Within a few decades cameralism was taught at most mid-European (German language) universities and even special cameralistic schools were established. Eighteenth-century scholars such as Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi and Joseph Sonnenfels developed more systematic and theoretically founded approaches. The core concept to denote the object of study was not "public administration," but "policy," "polity," or "police." Attempts to unite all potential relevant knowledge for a newly understood "public administration" never resulted in agreement or consensus. Again and again, attempts were undertaken to establish the study and to find its true foundations and unity. Early nineteenth-centuries changes in the topics discussed can be witnessed, and political economy and administrative law rose in prominence.

Likewise, this era witnessed a more modern concept of sciences emerging. For instance, the French author Charles-Jean Bonnin published *Principe d'administration publique*, or Principle of Public Administration in 1812. He called it (again) a practical science, and saw it as its key challenge: the need to balance law and social studies.

As before, early nineteenth-century authors never fully agreed on the nature of administrative sciences and pleaded for incorporating different perspectives or methodologies. After more than a century of growth, the study started to dwindle mid-nineteenth century and nearly disappeared entirely within ten years. Its eclipse derived from several external developments. In particular, the rise of economic studies and the development of the social sciences overwhelmed the study of administrative phenomena. Still, the most elaborate attempt to create a study of public administration dates from the second half of the nineteenth century. The German scholar Lorenz Von Stein (1815–1890) envisaged a comprehensive administrative science as the crown on all the sciences. Nevertheless, the study almost disappeared as administration became narrowed to "the execution of law." The further development of a study of public administration was left to the other side of the Atlantic.

In the slipstream of nineteenth-century ideas on the improvement of public ethics (the moral reform movement), a study of administration started to develop rather quickly in the early twentieth century in the United States. Traditionally, Wilson's essay "The Study of Administration" (1887), is regarded its first herald. Historically, it is more accurate to point at Goodnow's *Politics and Administration* (1900) and the establishment of the New York Bureau of Municipal Research in 1906. The focus was on creating a politically neutral, professional, performance-oriented, and responsive state apparatus. The normative distinction

between political and administrative made it possible to regard public administration as being in principle identical to business administration. This coincides with the rise of scientific management as developed by Taylor. A resulting search for universal administrative principles flourished in particular in the 1920s and 1930s. Public administration earned wide recognition and its main leaders were actively involved in all layers of U.S. government.

The modern period is thus characterized by: (1) serious attempts to develop an identifiable study of public administration (as we would understand it now), (2) numerous authors arguing the need for practical relevance of knowledge, and (3) efforts to integrate a number of (existing) bodies of knowledge that pertain to public administration. Originally, a broad mix of topics covered a range from forestry to healthcare, law and political/moral ideas, later turning to the entire social sciences (economics, political science, sociology, psychology) and law (the latter more prominent in Europe). An important characteristic of the modern period is that authors sought theoretical unity, as well as a singular foundation; their goal was to create a comprehensive, unifying theory. European forerunners of the study were unsuccessful, as were the pre-WWII American authors, for the search for "principles" and a normative foundation.

The Differentiated or Contemporary Period
By the 1950s, the American discourse on the study of public administration lost its self-confidence. Severe criticism focused on its claims to being scientific, in particular the aim to discovering law-like principles. Simon and Waldo are the most prominent post-war scholars to voice the need for new directions.

Simon (1947), argued for a new intellectual logical-positivistic science of decision making. Facts should be central and values ought not to be the object of administrative science. On the one hand, Simon stuck to the"modern" search for a universal basis of the study. On the other hand, he rejected the idea that, as a science, the study can, or even should, strive for integration of all possibly relevant knowledge involving administrative practice.

Contrary to Simon, Waldo (1948) underscored the political value basis of public administration. Rather than limiting the scope of the field, he called for a wider, more interpretative, and philosophical perspective, though without identifying or entrancing a single, monolithic methodology. By the 1960s, Waldo started to refer to an "identity crisis" and proposed to view the field as a "profession" or an "enterprise," utilizing a plurality of bodies that linked theory and practice.

The 1960s saw the development of an autonomous study of public administration taking off again in Europe. The United States heavily influenced these developments. Roughly, public administration scholars became divided along two dimensions: academic-versus practice-oriented and research versus educational ideals. The academic-research-oriented authors pursued a positivist approach in the spirit of Simon. Their focus centered on decision making and organization studies. Followers of Waldo addressing academic-education ideals primarily concentrated on forging a generalist curriculum that combined social sciences, history, comparative studies, and political theory. Advocates of both camps can also be found in Europe.

Discussions about the scientific status of the field and on its theoretical foundations continued unabated finding its focal point at the 1968 Minnowbrook Conference. Alternatives bloomed throughout the 1970s and 1980s, such as New Public Administration (launched in Minnowbrook), making a homogeneous view of the field virtually impossible. More or less independent '"schools" emerged focusing on either public policy or public management. Also more specific theoretical or methodological orientations, such as rational choice theory or communication theory, became popular. In Europe, the diversity in the study was much less, simply due to the small number of academics involved. European administrative sciences continued to be characterized by relatively strong, independent, and national "state-centered" traditions.

On and off during the 1980s, the study's mainstream trended toward a practically relevant, empirical public policy making and public management. Nevertheless, a proliferation of alternative approaches to the study continued, even by an explicit "refounding movement." Mainly inspired from administrative practice, "Reinventing Government or New Public Management" became a core topic in the debates in the 1990s. By the late 1990s and early twenty-first century, calls for a broadening of the field from "public administration" to "governance" were heard.

If pre-WWII period administrative sciences can be characterized by an institutionalization of research programs, academic curricula, and specialist journals and associations (at least in the United States), the post-war period witnessed a rapid growth of plurality and diversity in administrative theory and scope that defies any single unifying, easily comprehensible grasp of the study. Existence of an increasing body of knowledge in the study of administration does not result in a well-defined identity or self-image in the early twenty-first century. The search for a unifying, all-encompassing system or general theory, with an accompanying methodology, is no longer at the heart of the intellectual concerns

today. As in the modern period, a prime argument for attaining an independent status still relies on its ability to offer more than other studies do, for understanding and explaining the phenomenon of public administration.

This brief overview of the study's development indicates that scope and theory of the study demonstrate both continuity and change. There was more or less agreement since the mid-seventeenth century about what was important to study, even though topics disappeared and new one's arrived. In principle, all relevant knowledge and approaches, from the earliest founders onward, were deemed important for consideration. What topics took priority, which approaches should be dominant and included within administration studies, never resulted in a consensus at least in general terms.

The Study's Concern

Topics in the Literature

What is the object of study of public administration? Obviously, "public administration," but there is no generally accepted definition of public administration. To give some examples:

- "Public administration is detailed and systematic execution of public law." —Wilson (1887)
- "Public administration is the management of men and materials in the accomplishment of the purpose of the state." —Leonard D. White (1926)
- "When a government organizes for the effectuation of community business, we have what has come to be called public administration." —Dimock (1937)
- "Generally speaking, public administration is concerned with managing change in pursuit of publicly defined societal values." —Denhardt(1990)

These definitions do offer an idea what the study of public administration is about, but they vary considerably. Perhaps we can identify the topics addressed in the study of public administration, for instance by looking at one of the most impressive overviews of field as represented in the archives of the Public Administration Review (PAR); arguably the most important journal for featuring its general study over the decades. The variety of topics may seem almost endless; however, some topics recur with regularity, for instance, all kinds of "management" and "policy" surface and resurface. We may also notice the rise and fall of programming, planning and budgeting system (PPBS) and, a decade later, zero-based

budgeting. The image of what public administration is about does not easily arise out of such an eclectic array of topics.

A logical spot to look for a more structured overview of the topics dealt with in the study of public administration is offered by introductory books to the study. They give an insight into the topic and how they are linked according to the author(s). Usually these books are the way most of us become acquainted with the study in the first place. However, textbooks also show an immense diversity is apparent, that is, much less unanimity than expected. Also looking at textbooks may not result in more convergence (cf. Rutgers 1993; Kapucu 2012).

The Normative Nature of Scope

What is considered the scope of the study of public administration depends on our theoretical starting points. As the philosopher Karl Popper argued, theory precedes observation. There always are preliminary ideas about what are administrative phenomena in order to be able to observe them. Here we touch upon the notion of object constitution.

Meaning is given to a phenomenon by an observer: colors, shapes, and the like. A common starting point in modern epistemology is that there is no given reality, but there is always object constitution (as Edmund Husserl named it). The most basic tool to interpret phenomena is by learning to see similarities and differences, and thus to distinguish between the signals our senses register: similarity and difference constitutes the basic normative dichotomy enabling us to give meaning to our (bare) observations. Social phenomena are among the most complex to identify. They are rarely directly observable at all: bureaucracy, civil servant, due process, law, budget, and planning processes, depend on a broad, complex of meanings.

The object constitution thus concerns primarily a conceptual representation of reality and as such, constitutes the actual "scope" of the study, that is, what is regarded as real; it turns out that the field's scope is utterly intertwined with its theories. What phenomena, topics, or goals are regarded as proper for the study of public administration depends upon our ideas about reality, that is, about what constitutes public administration. This brings us to the question "what is theory?" Before turning to this methodological question, let us first delve a bit more into the ontology of the study: Why is the concept of public administration so tricky to pinpoint?

Scope: The Study's Ontology

<B>Conceptualizing Public Administration

When trying to define public administration we seem at a loss: "there really is no such subject as 'public administration,' but rather (…) public administration means different things to different observers and lacks a significant common theoretical or applied meaning" (Rosenbloom 1993, 5); "we may never agree on what that object of study actually is" (Raadschelders 2011a, 919–920).

Dunsire (1973) devoted a book to the meaning of (just) "administration" and distinguishes fifteen different uses of the term. Even the original Latin verb "administration" already has two distinct meanings: "to help, assist, or serve,", and "to manage, direct, or govern." The concept of public administration acquires its meaning in relation to many other concepts; that is, it is part of a semantic field. Its meaning depends on what is regarded public, private, management, politics, administration, and the like.

In order to get some insight into the intricacies of the concept of public administration, we can focus on three pairs of concepts: public and private, state and society, and politics and administration: the "founding dichotomies."

Public and Private

The similarities and differences of public and private administration concern an unavoidable topic in textbooks on public administration. The interpretation given to the differences has implications for ideas about people and organizations. Based on the nature of the distinction, many authors argue for different values guiding action. The public-private distinction is at the heart of the vast number of studies on public service motivation and public values. Weintraub therefore calls it the "grand dichotomy": a widespread organizing category that means several things at once (Weintraub 1997, 2).

Most authors put forward a set of characteristics to score public and private administration (cf. Starling 1986). Sometimes fundamental differences are argued, such as the prerequisite of public administration to ensure liberty, safety, and justice, or the presence of democratic legitimacy, state authority, and so on. The question what is actually '"public" about public administration regularly surfaces in the literature. Debates usually are framed in terms of opposing concepts such as "state" versus "market," or "profit" versus "non-profit." This is at the heart of debates on "privatization," "contracting out," "political liberty of functionaries," "democratic administration," "public management," and "representative

bureaucracy" (cf. Haque 1996; Luton 1996). It all indicates that the way public and private are conceptualized is constitutive for our concept of public administration.

Politics and Administration

Traditionally the politics/administration dichotomy is referred to in the study of public administration as *the* founding dichotomy (see Overeem 2012). Simply put, the dichotomy's main contribution is to enable us to distinguish between administration and politics. This has consequences for almost every topic in the discourse on public administration: responsibility, recruitment, the policy-process, professionalism, democracy, bureaucracy, etc. There is no unanimity about what the distinction precisely refers to, or if it is even tenable. For instance, Harmon aims to "dissolving the dualisms that still underwrite the legitimacy project of public administration's standard narrative" (Harmon 2006, 2).

The roots of the politics/administration dichotomy can be traced back to the cameralist and polity-science traditions to adapt to the idea of a separation of powers for administrative reality. This is also at the heart of Goodnow's *Politics and Administration* (1900). However, Wilson's call to distinguish the two is better known and often used to argue that he provided the foundations that "put the study on the map" in the United States. Paradoxically, the dichotomy immediately became an object of disagreement. Depending on the approach taken, the distinction can be assigned different characteristics that may lead to its acceptance or rejection (cf. Nieuwenburg & Rutgers 2001). Without it, politics and administration are conceptually identical. But in social reality we do distinguish between them, for instance, when attributing differences to politicians and administrators. Otherwise, if conceptually distinct, can we really keep politics and administration apart in the reality of decision making? Perhaps the relevance of the opposition is contextual. Most certainly it is vital to distinguish between the use of the dichotomy in a descriptive context or as a normative claim (are there different roles, and/or should there be?). Again, this dichotomy provides a disputed foundation; yet, without it a distinct object of study evaporates.

State and Society

The third grand dichotomy underlying the construction of the concept of public administration concerns the relation between state and society, and is equally problematic. It positions public administration as something "in between'" the authority to make decisions (state) and the people that are to be administered (society). There is a good case to be made to refer to the debates on administrative theory as a "Great State Debate" (Stillman 1991, 173). Discussions

of the nature of public administration in relation to state and society are, however, rare. Conversely, the literature on state and society in political theory is overwhelming (Dyson 1980).

The opposition of state and society originates in sixteenth-century debates whereby the monarch personified the state and governed by developing a polity for his subordinates (Manicas 1987, 25). The notion of "society" was framed as late as the nineteenth century, when Hegel distinguished "state" and "society" as two spheres of social action (Berki 1979, 8). Hegel's ideas were used by Stein, who conceptualized the administrative or "the working state." This in turn influenced the discourse on both sides of the Atlantic (; Van Riper 1983; Miewald 1984).

Of the three dichotomies, the state/society opposition is perhaps the most difficult to grasp. This is due to two factors. First, there is relatively little appreciation in administrative discourse of the dependence of our idea of public administration on the concept of state. Second, the idea of some kind of cleft or opposition between state and society hardly seems to be noticed as a topic as the two are presupposed to be "interlocking," yet different. As with the politics/administration dichotomy, we seem to be left with a dichotomy we cannot abolish entirely, nor accept with all its connotations and patent difficulties in representing social reality.

In recent literature the term "governance" is presented as comprehensively referring to the governing or administration of "state and society." Governance seems to suggest an image of social reality where a state/society bifurcation disappears, and according to some, even a distinction between public and private. However, governance is so undifferentiated that it seems unlikely it can replace "state and society" or "public administration." This reflects in a multitude of "kinds of governance": private, public, even government governance.

Continuing to attack the validity of the three founding dichotomies is as much beside the point as it is unwise to uncritically or dogmatically accept them, and thus ignore the varying meanings in the core concepts the study of public administration contains. Moreover, there is mutual influence, overlap, and interdependence. To conclude, it can be noticed that the studies subject matter— "ontology"— is perhaps more complex and less straight forward as expected at first glance. There is not some easily identifiable set of characteristics, let alone some empirical phenomenon authors agree upon as constituting "public administration."

Theory and the Methodology of the Study

The Methodological Quandrum

As stated before, a study is characterized by both its object of study and the ideas (and ideals) with regard to the best, correct, and/or valid way of studying, that is, accepted and prescribed ways of constructing, testing, and changing theories. Any study is characterized by an ontology and methodology (cf. Hollis 1994). The two are intertwined (together constituting the epistemology), whereby the methodology prescribes the kind of theories and methods of investigation that are accepted as valid. This is where the strength of academic research relies: the validity of truth claims relies on the methodology as a touchstone for "scientific truth." As there is a multiplicity of methodologies and methods abound within the social sciences, this is also the case in the study of public administration.

From the days of the ancient Greeks through twentieth-century logical empiricism, ideas of theory as a "hypothetical-deductive system" has been developed; that is, a theory should start from established axioms and hypothesis on the basis of which all explanations can be deduced: "Explanation is thus a matter of showing how things happened because of the laws of the theory" (Honderich 1995, 871). Many argued this sort of theory is only suitable for the natural sciences. Although it is beyond this chapter to delve into all the intricacies, some theorizing is necessary as different views on scientific theory have consequences for our understanding of the study of public administration.

Naturalism

For simplicity, we can distinguish between two approaches: the naturalistic and the interpretative. To start with the former, the basic idea of naturalism is that theories meet a range of specific criteria, the most important one being that theories are in principle universally applicable. Theories are attempts to explain observed regularities or universal laws. They enable us to argue from contingent observation to universal knowledge, such as in Newton's law of gravity. Theories enable us to explain and, what is more, to predict, as theories are focused on causal explanations. This makes explanation and prediction symmetrical: theories explain by subsuming a case under a theoretical regularity or law, which enables us also to predict. The predictive power of a theory becomes a paramount characteristic of a good theory. From this logic derives the positivistic claim that science can help improve society by means of prediction. What is more, positivists claim this can be done objectively, that is, without being confounded by values. In the study of public administration, the best-known adherent is Simon (1947).

Naturalistic theory is widely accepted, and is as much disputed. Its core theories prove not to be as integrated and deductive as originally stipulated. A major difference is that the traditional idea of scientific theory aims at prescription, whereas modern schools regard theory primarily a means for description in accord with actual observations on how the sciences actually work (cf. Honderich 1995, 871).

Within naturalistic methodology different kinds of theory may be distinguished. They are in part indicative for the problems related to this methodology. First, theory in the exact sciences is primarily a collection of theorems, that is, statements about empirical reality that are (to some extend) verifiable, that is, some terms used by science reference outside language and are empirically verifiable. A second meaning of theory, Rapoport illustrates by means of pendulum theory (law); there are many discrepancies between the theory and the motion of a pendulum in reality: the theory presumes a number of clearly unrealistic assumptions, such as absence of friction (1958, 975). Ultimately, the aim is to describe a theory in a formal mathematical language, referring to a highly idealized world.

A major problem is that many key concepts in theories are difficult to express in empirically verifiable terms. In this case, well known examples are length, time, and mass. The problems of being able to clearly define key variables increases when going from physics to the social sciences. In the latter, many concepts originate in common sense. For example, in definitions of "crime" or "religion": a scientific definition may be at odds with what people (the object of study) regard as crime or religious (cf. Winch 1988, 73). Here we touch upon the issues of double hermeneutics. Whereas in physics scientists are more or less free to define concepts, in the social sciences, language and meanings are themselves part of the object of study.

Hermeneutics
The other main methodological stance is the interpretative or hermeneutic. Whereas naturalism approaches reality externally and aims for objective observation, this approach seeks to understand what reasons are (internally) triggering human action. This difference can be captured in terms of a focus on (causal) explanation versus understanding (reason-explanation). Laws or law-like explanations are regarded of less importance or even irrelevant as phenomenon have to be analyzed in a specific time and place (such as, "Why did Caesar cross the Rubicon?"). The hermeneutic methodology also rejects the possibility of objective observation; all observation is somehow "'theory driven." In social sciences the interpretation of human behavior is central, and human behavior is very much influenced by peoples'

understanding of reality. This is so-called double hermeneutics: human action is knowledge-driven and the researcher has to interpret interpretations.

In this context we can also place "normative theory," that is, theories that are explicitly value driven and do not fit positivism. Such theory attempts to develop a framework for researching "democratic administration."

Whereas the claims of naturalism are perhaps not tenable, the hermeneutic approach lacks in criteria for what makes a "good" or "successful" theory, that is, methodological criteria (cf. Hollis 1995). The best available rules are conceivably the hermeneutic circle (the whole is needed to explain the parts, and the parts are needed to explain the whole), and Gadamer's (1972) notion of the "melting of horizons." The latter is the requirement that interpretations should overlap with the original meanings somehow, and that interpretations should be contextually verifiable or reproducible (somehow).

Debates

There are many more (specific) stances around that fit in the two broad methodologies, such as phenomenology, scientific realism, and critical theory. Thus, almost without exception, post-modernists fit in the hermeneutic methodology. Building on Ludwig Wittgenstein and Michel Foucault, they point to the linguistic nature of all knowledge, all discourse, and regard knowledge (and rationality) bounded by local context. Jacques Deridat takes the most extreme stance in this regard by even rejecting the universality of the requirement of consistency. Nevertheless, even within the naturalistic framework Popper argued relativism in the sense that we can have either truth or certainty, not both.

The main point here is that quarrels about what kind of theory students of public administration should look for turns ultimately on the ideas about what constitutes scientific research. Within the study of public administration, a couple of famous debates can, to a large extent, be reduced to such methodological differences, even though the authors in question may not explicitly make such assumptions clear (for instance, Simon versus Waldo). Several authors explicitly discuss the advantages and disadvantages of different methodologies (White 1986; Fischer 1990, 240 seq.), and quite a few reject positivism, yet nevertheless stick to the ideas about the requirements of theory espoused by it. Authors may even profess postmodernism as an excuse not to elaborate on methodological starting points, just ascertain that authors may adhere to a naturalistic stance and at the same time refer to (Kuhnian) paradigms. This probably occurs most clearly in discussions about the possibility of an interdisciplinary study of public administration, which brings us to the next section.

The Issue of Interdisciplinarity

As we have seen, call for the study of public administration to bring together knowledge is as old as the study's roots in the eighteenthcentury. It arises from the practical necessity to cope with social problems that require all available insights. This practical argument was as relevant 300 years ago as it is today. However, cogency increased due to the specialization within the sciences, that is, the fragmentation of our knowledge (cf. Raadschelders 2008).

There is also a more theoretical argument: the sciences today seek more consistent and coherent theories than any time before. However, it should be noted that, whereas the practical need for unified theory wants to arrive at (more) concrete knowledge, the theoretical drive aims for more encompassing, that is, more abstract, theory.

The Disciplinary Paradox

A catchphrase for arriving at unified knowledge is "interdisciplinarity." Theories developed within various specialized disciplines or paradigms should somehow become a coherent theory. To begin, we should consider the nature of disciplines, and then turn to associated terms such as multi- and interdisciplinarity. First we need to take a look at the concept of scientific paradigms.

"Paradigm" is widely used in the study of public administration. Usually it denotes a specific way of viewing phenomena, that is, a specific ontology and methodology for the study. For instance, Nicolas Henry discusses the development of the study in terms of emerging paradigms (Henry 1989). Etymologically, paradigm simply means "example": paradigmatic research is an example for other researchers. Thomas Kuhn, however, famously used the term in a much more specific sense to explain scientific development.

For Kuhn, a paradigm consists of a fundamental scientific study, with a theory, open questions, and examples of doing research. If accepted as such by a group of scientists it can be regarded as a scientific paradigm. For scientists, Kuhn writes: "Their paradigm tells them about the sorts of entities with which the universe is populated and about the way the members of that population behave: in addition, it informs them of the questions that may legitimately be asked about nature and of the techniques that can properly be used in search for answers to them" (Kuhn 1972, 86). Once a field of study developed a paradigm, it can be defined as a fully developed science, and thereby rational progress becomes possible. An integral part of Kuhn's theory— but often overlooked— is that a paradigm is not established overnight, it has a history and exists for quite a while before it is recognized as such. Kuhn

actually stresses that only with hindsight can existence of a paradigm be identified. It is not something than can be planned.

As a paradigm is an accepted, more or less closed system of knowledge that gives meaning to reality, according to Kuhn, it is almost impossible to comprehend what scientists within another paradigm address because a paradigm is exclusive for its followers. This underscores that a paradigm is not something easily accepted or rejected. Paradigms can be completely at odds with one another about the nature of reality and of research; what one calls incommensurable (i.e., beyond comparison). Once a paradigm has been established, over time disputes arise due to inherent problems it cannot deal with (so-called anomalies). Ultimately, this may result in a so-called "revolutionary phase" in which a paradigm is succeeded by another. As rationality is possible only within a paradigm (as it stipulates the very criteria for rational discourse), transition between paradigms is itself not rational to Kuhn.

Thus, "paradigm" is a descriptive concept. However, Kuhn rejects prescriptive use and even explicitly points at social scientists in this respect as "badly misconstruing my point" (1970, 245). It is in this sense that in our study Golembiewski writes: "Kuhn's view of scientific development is a questionable guide" (1977, 208).

Kuhn is not clear on the relation between paradigm and discipline. He writes about a "set of paradigms" (1970, 272) within a discipline, but in his later work (i.e., from 1973 onward) he replaces "paradigm" by "disciplinary matrix." Nevertheless, others stick to Kuhn's early terminology, such as Ospina (2011) suggesting, in response to Riccucci (2010), that the study is "preparadigmatic,, rather than "postnormal"; both sticking to the early Kuhnian terminology. Raadschelders (2011b, 5) goes so far as stating that the paradigm concept is not applicable in the social sciences.

"Discipline" usually carries a greater authority and respectability than "paradigm," thus authors may write about paradigms within a discipline (i.e., not Kuhn himself). No unanimity concerning the disciplinary status of the study of public administration exists. For instance, Waldo rejects it, whereas others write books about "the state of the discipline" (cf. Lynn & Wildavsky, 1990). Whether or not the study of public administration is a discipline or not, depends on what is considered characteristic of a discipline. In a loose sense the term can merely indicate that there are organizational units in the universities called "public administration." In a stricter sense discipline refers to a coherent body of knowledge, with shared (ontological and methodological) assumptions: the stuff Kuhn attributed to a paradigm.

However, it can be used more vaguely, as does Denhardt writing about the study as a discipline, with a "tremendous richness and complexity," which "lacks a sense of identity" (1990, 43).

As an epistemological concept, discipline refers to a clear, comprehensive set of rules and regulations for control and obedience (as it does in sports and the military). A scientific discipline consists of a set of ideas and norms for research, resulting in a certain way of thinking and reasoning. As Rapoport puts it: "'discipline' means constraint on the mode of thought. It prescribes a repertoire of concepts, the patterns of classification, the rules of evidence, and the etiquette of discourse" (1958, 972). Toulmin (1972) argues that physical sciences, the legal profession, and engineering traditions can be regarded disciplines in this strict sense. He regards the social sciences "would-be disciplines" as there is a plurality in "learnings" rather than discipline of thought uniting social science scholars. Factors Toulmin mentions as hampering the development of a discipline are probably familiar to students of public administration: a great variety and complexity of objects of research, absence of common concepts used for structuring the study, and lack of fully developed methods for resolving problems.

One can relax the notion of discipline, yet what remains central is the idea that within a discipline the meaning and validity of statements is warranted: it provides the context within which claims to knowledge (scientific truth) are possible. Even this minimal notion results in the so-called "disciplinary paradox": if we describe the social sciences in terms of disciplines, interdisciplinarity then by definition lacks the warranty of a discipline. Usually multi-disciplinary research is regarded a kind of "first step" and suggests a less bold claim: findings from different origins are just juxtaposed. In the case of interdisciplinarity a new kind of coherence, and integration, is however claimed or strived for.

Interdisciplinarity is thus a contradiction in terms. For this reason, Mainzer opposes a movement toward interdisciplinary (1994, 365). An alternative is to eliminate the word interdisciplinarity, and refer to the integration of theories. In any case perhaps wisdom needs to be exercised when applying the unreflected idea of discipline to the social sciences.

<B>*Images of an Integrated Study of Public Administration*

Before delving further into the more philosophical debates, let us consider the efforts within the study of public administration. Three approaches can be distinguished. First, a group of authors searches for a single foundation for the study; a second group argues for unity within diversity; and a third seeks identity in heterogeneity.

The first approach is the dominant and also most diverse for authors developing very different foundations for unity. Three examples serve as illustrations. First, Waldo attempts to resolve the crisis of identity by "adopting a professional perspective" (Waldo 1968, 9). However, he is well aware that a professional perspective is supposed to build upon training in a specific discipline. Therefore, it cannot be a real option and he concludes: "let's-act-like-a-profession-even-though-we-can't-be-one" (Waldo, in Brown & Stillman 1986, 105). Luhmann in his early works examines the founding of the study of public administration (*Verwaltungswissenschaft*). He argues that from a systems perspective public administration is a complexity reduction mechanism for authoritative decision making in every society (1966, 69–70). All other approaches, he claims, can be reframed or reduced to an idea of system rationality.

Ostrom (1974) also develops a theoretical starting point, but as a normative political theory of democratic administration. Combined with a public choice methodology, this should constitute a new paradigm for the study (note the attempts to design a paradigm).

The three approaches are all inherently reductionist: Waldo's approach reduces the study to a "profession"; Luhmann and Ostrom exemplify posing an encompassing theoretical perspective. None, however, became accepted or succeeded in dominating administrative sciences.

The second cluster of authors offers room for diversity in approaches, yet also tries to find unity without reducing the acknowledged needed diversity to a single starting point. Two authors illustrate this.

Golembiewski (1977) distinguishes three mini-paradigms in the (existing) study of public administration. The focus should not be on the development of a single theoretical core for the study, but rather on specific abilities and technologies to solve problems. He tells us: "just do it." In the end, this perspective may result in some shared core, he argues. What remains open is how by focusing on more limited, specific, practical topics approaches can be unified.

Van Braam (1989) discusses the development of the study of public administration from eclecticism to a multi- and eventually interdisciplinary study. He does not speculate on the content of the possible theories that will emerge, and is aware that there are different normative ideas that may block all efforts at unification, particularly due to the variety of images of humanity and society authors (have to) assume.

Both authors indicate that if diversity in the social sciences is taken seriously, stipulating an encompassing theory becomes problematic. Both, in a sense, aim for unity, but

are keenly aware of the difficulties that must be overcome; both consider this gap too wide to bridge at present, but they stay hopeful.

The third group takes matters a bit further by abolishing the idea of future theoretical unity. Contemporary administrative study becomes characterized as inherently heterogenic: fragmentation is not something to be solved in one singular way. Even more than previous authors, the starting point is in a meta-theory of the study, that is, an interpretation of the nature of social science and interdisciplinarity, rather than focusing on the development of a specific (empirical or normative) theory providing an all-encompassing ontology and methodology for the study. Again two authors can serve as examples.

König (1970) argues that there are a number of integrative theories existing next to each other. He distinguishes four approaches, or "knowledge interests" relevant for public administration that may integrate theories: an orientation on norms (normativity); facts (reality); possibilities (potentiality); and aspiration (ideality). The first coincides with a legal approach to public administration; the others fit more within the social sciences and political theory. What remains is a multiplicity of "administrative sciences." He thinks that the ordinary administrative scientist will not be able to break through the barriers between them. This does, however, not imply that König regards integration of theories impossible. In order to integrate theories and knowledge, some kind of system of reference (*Bezugssystem*) is required: a meta-theory that provides the criteria to select concepts and norms regarded relevant form its perspective. There can be no encompassing or "ultimate" integration, but selection and integration is also not random or eclectic, but guided by an explicit perspective (König 1980, 39). He points in particular to decision theory as a fundamental basis for possible integration(s) in the study of public administration.

Raadschelders (2000) outlines the reasons for the compartmentalization of knowledge about public administration ranging from simple specialization and work division to a profound fragmentation of Western thought, as well as four types of integration of knowledge, from professional to a unified science. The types of fragmentation can be connected to types of integration. Like König he argues that ultimate integration is not possible: "The fact that contesting frameworks of reference exist does not leave much hope that unity of knowledge in public administration, or in the social sciences at large, can be achieved" (207). The best available alternative would be differentiated integration: "This is … still not an integration at a theoretical level, but rather an integration around either an organization of the field or around a conceptual approach to the field" (206). It implies that integration and coherence might potentially achieve by starting from an explicit unifying conceptualization.

Raadschelders does so himself, for instance, in his *Government: A Public Administration Perspective* (2003b).

Delusion or Differentiated Study?

Currently, there is perhaps less of a call for unification than in the course of thetwentieth century. The insight that the study of public administration has to rely on a multitude of methods and methodologies is captured by Fitzpatrick et al. in the call for comparative research: "Superior comparative public administration research does not consist of one type of study. Good theory building and guidance for practitioners comes from a variety of types of research—causal, descriptive, and exploratory; essays and research; studies with large and small sample sizes; research using complex multivariate statistics; and research using accepted qualitative methods" (2011, 827).

As we have seen previously, once the sciences are conceptualized in terms of disciplines or paradigms, the problem of the disciplinary paradox arises. Social sciences defy any attempt to reduce them to a few "schools" and "paradigms." As Fredrickson underscores, "There will doubtless continue to be arguments that public administration is neither a field, profession, nor discipline" (1976, 575). He concludes that the study should not become any of them; it exists as interdisciplinary. So, part of the problem of the identity concerns its images and ideals that scholars assume about the nature of a study itself. Though we may regard Mainzer's suggestion to the safety of "the discipline of political science" (is it really?), he does pose a core problem: "An interdisciplinary approach to public administration study may mask a fuzzy eclecticism that lacks any sense of what is most significant" (1994, 364). Similarly, Newland wrote "the diversity can be more than a maddening weakness. Correctness is lacking. And some movements have encouraged reduced linkage" (1994, 486), he even refers to "a field of strangers in search of a discipline" (487). What is more, an interdisciplinary study is also a specialization among disciplines, unless it can replace its constituent "disciplines." That this is unlikely is supported by Wright showing that research from the study of public administration is rarely referred to in journals on law, management, or political science: "the interdisciplinary field of public administration is largely isolated" (2011, 101).

The integration of theories was not regarded problematic in the philosophy of the sciences for a long time, as the positivistic "empirical cycle" was supposed to do the job of testing all theories. What is more, the (natural) sciences are supposed to share one mathematical language, thereby guaranteeing the possibility of comparison and integration.

Kuhn firmly rejected this image; even the rational progress of the sciences is rejected. Theories on and methods for the integration of knowledge, that is, for interdisciplinarity research, are still rare. Thus one can hardly blame scholars of public administration wrestling with the nature of their study!

The most pronounced problem discussed in relation to the viability of interdisciplinarity concerns incommensurability or untranslatability of concepts and theories. Recognition of this problem derives (again) from Kuhn's paradigm theory. As each paradigm constitutes a specific context for providing meaning, it is conceivable that concepts and theories may be totally different. However, incommensurability is not limited to Kuhn's theory. In particular Feyerabend wrote about it, but he does not regard it an acute problem for the everyday scientist (1978, 190). Others, however, point out that incommensurability can occur among theories within the same conceptual framework (cf. Hintikka 1988) and even in everyday settings. The ability to understand different perspectives does still not imply that their contents can be compared or integrated (cf. Feyerabend 1970, 227; 1975, 284). As Mesaros and Balfour argue, the real question is whether we can construct [what they call] "trans-paradigmatic evidence." Feyerabend thinks it is achievable, however, not within the sciences, but rather by means of philosophical doctrine. In short, according to Feyerabend there will never be "inter-paradigmatic evidence" without explicit choices being made. This problem is therefore not solved by Mesaros and Balfour's observation that "relativity is ontologically constitutive of humans not of the world" (30), for conflicting theories may explain the "same" facts. Thus even if we agree on "trans-disciplinary evidence," it is still possible to construct incommensurable theories. This latter issue is known as the Duhem-Quine thesis (cf. Peterson 1984).

How then to conceptualize an interdisciplinary study of public administration? In line with König and Raadschelders the study of public administration can be regarded a differentiated study (cf. Rutgers 1993). A differentiated study is an area of interest whose boundaries and contents are describable in terms of the topics dealt with, within which knowledge from different sources (basic disciplines) can be integrated. Integration and selection of relevant theories may be attained by means of the formulation of constantly changing, varying integrative theories derived from one or more of the approaches regarded relevant within the differentiated study. This reflects the ideas captured by Golembiewski in terms of mini-paradigms, as well as in singular approaches of Ostrom and Luhmann. However, the universalistic claims of these approaches must be rejected. No integrative theory can or should provide a final unifying basis, for it would destroy the "interdisciplinary"

outlook of the entire study and thereby reduce it to just another scientific specialism. Although any image of the study as a differentiated study may be useful and in line with recent ideas on the philosophy of the social sciences, a meta-theory as such does not provide an integrative framework. Fuzziness and eclecticism can only be resolved by clearly outlining the approach taken and by indicating why it is the most relevant and tenable. Any integrative theory should convincingly provide us with a conceptualization of an aspect of public administration: the conceptualization of public administration as an object of study.

A Future for the Study of Public Administration?

> <ext>"It is of great use to the sailor to know the length of his line, though he cannot with it fathom all the depths of the ocean" John Locke, 1690 (1978, 16).<ext>

After more than half a century, Waldo's diagnosis of an identity crisis is still haunting the study. On the one hand, the whole idea of a crisis, as well as its solution(s), hinge on assumptions about what constitutes an identity for a study in the first place. On the other hand, it suggests there perhaps never really was a crisis, or, alternatively— as I argued elsewhere (Rutgers 1998)— perhaps "crises" in the sense of rejecting some disciplinary or paradigmatic closed system, is the very identity of the study of public administration. The study is and has to be pluralistic, multi, and/or interdisciplinary if its students intend to understand "public administration" comprehensively for both academic and practical purposes. Fredrickson and Smith note: "Any linear process of theory in public administration, any semblance of a steady incremental march toward a central paradigm or disciplinary objective— these disappeared long ago" (2003, 246). Perhaps it is time to abolish attempts to construct some ultimate integrative, coherent theory of public administration in the positivistic sense and embrace the interdisciplinary and differentiated nature of the study (cf. Raadschelders 2011b).

Integration does not so much result in a coherent body of knowledge, but points at a process of continuously striving for the confrontation of diverging approaches in order to better understand some aspect of (what constitutes) administrative reality. As Klein states: "Interdisciplinarity is neither a subject matter nor a body of content. It is a process for achieving an integrative synthesis, a process that usually begins with a problem, question, topic, or issue" (1990, 188). Considered from a historical, as well as from an epistemological perspective, a unifying framework does not seem to either characterize the study or constitute

a prerequisite for its continuation. This, however, does not imply we can neglect reflection on the study's ontologies and methodologies; to the contrary, it stresses the need to do so. The quote from John Locke points at precisely this, that is,the need to understand the "length of our line" as the need to understand what the effect is of the normative nature of our theories, and the methodological starting points of our undertaking for we know our concepts and insights will not fit every problem in time or place. Following Meier we can conclude: "Public administration is many things with many research agendas; any single characterization, including this one, by definition will be incomplete" (2015, 16).

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